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Arc opens doors to independence

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Wednesday, Feb. 6, 2008 3:00 am

Michelle Nichols, 21, and her 9-month old son, Cameron, were the first to move in to one of the Opening Doors Supportive Apartments on Feb. 1.

The Arc of High Point and the Arc of North Carolina, organizations for the advocacy and support of people with disabilities, opened four condominiums in two developments this month, with help and funding from the city of High Point.

Wayne Dawson, housing resources services coordinator of the Arc of North Carolina, said the goal is to stop building group homes and move toward independent living for people with disabilities.

"People should be able to live wherever they want and services should come to them," he said.

Terry Williams, 36, and Pete Terry, 23, will move in by the end of February.

Though he has been getting around independently for years, Williams, who has been living with his parents, said he can't wait to be on his own.

"It will be wonderful," he said. "I'll be responsible for my own stuff, my cell phone, Internet, cable."

Terry has been living in a house on his own for a while.

"It's in a bad neighborhood," he said. "This is much nicer."

The Arc's mission is to advocate for people with disabilities and help them live their lives the way they want to, free of stigmas.

The Arc of North Carolina has built more than 200 homes in the past 26 years for people with disabilities who get help paying rent through subsidies from the Housing 400 Initiative.

In 2006 the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services partnered in this initiative created by the General Assembly to help finance apartments for people with disabilities who are on Social Security.

Each person who moves into an Arc condominium or apartment receives advice from a life-skills coach, sometimes 20 to 40 hours per week, depending on need. The coach will help with money management, household maintenance and provide other resources and support.

